

# **Rights of People with Disabilities to Register and Vote**

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**<http://www.disabilityrightsca.org>**

# Registrants with Disabilities

(US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Nov. 2012)

Reported Registered: 19 million people with disabilities

Registration rate: People w/disabilities registered at 69.2% vs. 71.5% w/o disabilities (2.3% points lower)

# Registrants with Disabilities

(US Census Bureau, Current Population Survey, Nov. 2012)

## Registration Rates Lower for Certain Groups:

- Cognitive difficulty: 59.3% (-12.2%)
- Ambulatory difficulty: 69.5% (-2%)
- Self-care difficulty: 62.1% (-9.4%)

# Registrants with Disabilities

(Disability, Voter Turnout, and Voting Difficulties in the 2012 Elections. Lisa Schur, Meera Adya, Douglas Kruse <http://smlr.rutgers.edu/research-centers/disability-and-voter-turnout>)

## How Individuals w/Disabilities Registered to Vote:

Town hall/county/gov. registration office: 31.5%

DMV: 21.9%

By mail: 15.8%

Public assistance agency: 2.7%

# Registrants with Disabilities

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## Why Individuals Did Not Register:

Most common reason for not registering to vote:

lack of interest in the election or politics:  
(disability: 32.1%; no disability: 45.2%)

Specific reasons for not registering to vote:

Permanent illness or disability:  
(disability: 24.5%; no disability: 1.2%)

# **Registrants with Disabilities**

## **VRAs are required to:**

- Provide a Voter Registration Card (VRC) and Voter Preference Form
- Assist with filling them out when requested
- Provide the same level of assistance completing the VRC as in completing the agency's own form
- Provide assistance in the person's home if agency provides services in the person's home

# Registrants with Disabilities

## **Common Misconceptions Why People with Disabilities Cannot Register or Vote:**

- If the person has a disability: physical, psychiatric, intellectual disability, developmental disability, etc.
- If the person is not able to read
- If the person is not able to write
- If the person uses a wheelchair (access concerns)
- If the person is under conservatorship

# Registrants with Disabilities

(California Elections Code Sec. 2208)

## Who Decides?

Only a court can decide: Any person who has not been judged by a court “not capable of completing an affidavit of voter registration.”

Don't make assumptions about a person's ability to register and to vote based on the person's disability.



# **Registrants with Disabilities**

## **Assistance to Applicants**

Voter Registration Agency Employees:

- Do not make statements or take actions that give the impression that registering to vote has bearing on whether they get services
- Do not take any action with the purpose or effect of discouraging voter registration
- Do not seek to influence political party preference or party registration

# Disability Etiquette

## Basic Guidelines

- Make references to the person first then the disability: Say “a person with a disability” rather than “a disabled person.”
- Do not use the term “handicapped” when referring to a person with a disability.
- Offer assistance, but wait until your offer is accepted before you help.
- Listen to any instructions the person may give.

# Disability Etiquette

## Common Courtesies

- Share the same social courtesies. If you shake hands with people you meet, offer your hand to everyone you meet, regardless of their disabilities.
- When offering assistance to a person with a visual impairment, allow that person to take your arm. Guide, rather than propel or lead the person. Use specific directions when directing a person with a visual impairment.

# Disability Etiquette

## Conversation

- Speak directly to the person with a disability, not to the person accompanying them. The same principle applies for people who communicate through sign language.
- When greeting a person with a severe loss of vision, always identify yourself and others. For example say, “On my right is John Smith.”

# Disability Etiquette

## Conversation (cont'd)

- Speak in a normal tone of voice and indicate when the conversation is over. Let them know when you move from one place to another.

For more information on disability etiquette:

<http://www.unitedspinal.org/pdf/DisabilityEtiquette.pdf>

For more information about voting rights of individuals with disabilities:

<http://www.disabilityrightsca.org/pubs/PublicationsVoting.htm>